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Université d'Ottawa
Faculté des sciences
Cabinet du doyen

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Science
Office of the Dean

February 21st, 2008

Professor Denis G. Rancourt
Department of Physics
INTRA

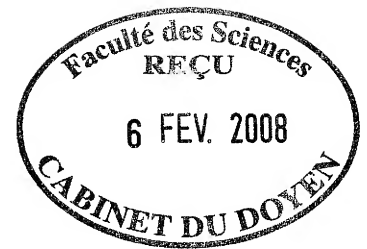
Dear Professor Rancourt,

Please find included to this letter the text of a complaint against you signed by Professor Keith Benn of the Department of Earth Sciences. I am therefore following the procedures set forth in article 39.1.2 of the Collective Agreement and asking that you provide me with your written response to this complaint before March 6th, 2008.

Yours truly,

André E. Lalonde
Dean
Faculty of Science

February 4, 2008



to: Professeur André E. Lalonde, Doyen, Faculté des Sciences
from: Keith Benn, Associate Professor, Earth Sciences

Cher Doyen,

I am submitting this letter of complaint regarding an email that was widely circulated by Professeur D. Rancourt, on November 30, 2007. I responded to Rancourt's email with an email of my own, on December 1, 2007, expressing my dismay at the accusation of censorship that was contained in Rancourt's email. I am attaching a copy of my response to Rancourt's email along with his email, and also another email from S. Stojanovic that was included in Rancourt's November 30 communication. I saved those three emails as pdf files and the text I am attaching is identical to the text in the original electronic communications.

I take serious offence to the accusation of censorship that is contained in the following passage that I have cut and pasted from Rancourt's email. The bold typeface in the following text was added by me.

"When SCI 2101 was discussed at the Faculty Curriculum Committee in 2006 some of the latter material ("SOME GROUND RULES" section) was **censored**, so I was pleased to see that you have not practiced such **censorship** in forwarding Mr. Stojanovic's documents as-received."

Here is my understanding of what led to Rancourt's November 30 email communication that included the accusation of censorship. It appears that some documents had been submitted to the Faculty of Science and that the person who submitted them had hoped the documents would be provided, in their entirety, to members of the Faculty Curriculum Committee, at a meeting in 2006. It appears that not all of the submitted documents were included in the paperwork. It appears that the non-inclusion of that documentation, especially that part entitled "SOME GROUND RULES", led Rancourt to make his accusation of censorship against the person who compiled the documents for the meeting, or perhaps against the Faculty Curriculum Committee. In fact, the person or persons against whom the accusation of censorship was made are unnamed in Rancourt's email.

The "SOME GROUND RULES" section referred to in Rancourt's November 29 email is included in the email sent by Stojanovic, on November 21, 2007 (attached). That text was apparently prepared by Rancourt. The "GROUND RULES" were a set of statements that imply the various committees of the Faculty have been remiss in fulfilling their mandate regarding curriculum questions and in their mode of operation. In them Rancourt accuses the committees of being "paternalistic" and "authoritarian" and he implies that the committees have shown a lack of respect and of due process in considering changes or additions to the curriculum. I will not discuss the merit, or lack thereof, of the "GROUND RULES". I am lodging a complaint about Rancourt's unfortunate response to the omission of the unnecessary and arbitrary "GROUND RULES" text from the Faculty Curriculum Committee meeting to which Rancourt refers.

Rancourt must know that the term "censorship" is a highly charged one that carries some awful baggage in the public psyche. Tossing about accusations of administrative censorship in widely circulated emails in response to the non-inclusion of the trivial "GROUND RULES" text is reckless and reprehensible, and shows a profound lack of respect for our institution and for our colleagues. It is especially troubling that such an accusation should be made within our University and it is unacceptable that it go unchallenged. If such an accusation should go

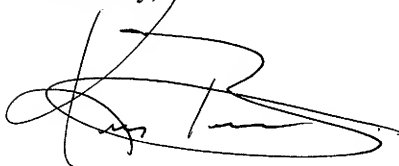
unchallenged then the clear message to the University community, and to the community at large, is that the accusation has merit, i.e., that discussion of important issues facing our Faculty and our University are being suppressed. Rancourt's accusation of censorship, if unchallenged, could do long-term damage to the reputation of our institution. I find the accusation of censorship in Rancourt's email to be unacceptable and it is my opinion that this issue should be formally addressed.

In my email response to Rancourt, I requested that he explain his accusation at the next meeting of Faculty Council, on December 6, 2007. I further suggested that if the accusation were found to be unjustified, then Rancourt should apologize publicly to his victims.

Unfortunately, the Faculty Council meeting that followed the email, at which I was present, was quickly hijacked by a very loud, aggressive and verbally abusive student who insisted on shouting down any member of Council who tried to speak, including yourself. You will recall that you were obliged to adjourn the meeting before any of the business of the Faculty could be dealt with, due to the boorish behavior of the student. I commend you for your calm and patience in dealing with that regrettable and distasteful incident, which also (perhaps conveniently for Rancourt) prevented the issue of Rancourt's accusation of censorship from being discussed by Council.

I am submitting this complaint against Rancourt in the hope that it will be possible to have the issue of his accusation of censorship addressed in an appropriate forum, so that the university community can know if there is any merit to the accusation, which I think unlikely. At the very least, an apology from Rancourt should be forthcoming and recorded in the public record.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Keith Benn', written over a horizontal line.

Keith Benn
Associate Professor
Earth Sciences

From: "Keith Benn" <kbenn@mailbox.uottawa.ca>
To: <dgr@uottawa.ca>
Cc: <aray013@uottawa.ca>; <chmchair@science.uottawa.ca>;
<alex.lavigne@hotmail.com>; <allison_enright@hotmail.com>; <deansci@uottawa.ca>;
<alongtin@uottawa.ca>; <arian.novruzi@mathstat.uottawa.ca>;
<phychair@science.uottawa.ca>; <daniel.cayleydaoust@gmail.com>;
<carrier@uottawa.ca>; <dfortin@uottawa.ca>; <David.Bryce@uottawa.ca>;
<dehsg@uottawa.ca>; <David.Schneider@uottawa.ca>; <gblou656@science.uottawa.ca>;
<ssa_pres@science.uottawa.ca>; <gdrouin@science.uottawa.ca>;
<heshel@science.uottawa.ca>; <idclark@uottawa.ca>; <jharden@uottawa.ca>;
<jerbrammer@hotmail.com>; <jarnason@science.uottawa.ca>;
<John.Baenziger@uottawa.ca>; <jblais@science.uottawa.ca>; <khattori@uottawa.ca>;
<kbenn@science.uottawa.ca>; <doyenadj@science.uottawa.ca>; <louiseh@uottawa.ca>;
"LLABELLE@science.uottawa.ca" <llabelle@science.uottawa.ca>;
<mtarcl100@uottawa.ca>; <martbert@gmail.com>; <matthew.alteen@gmail.com>;
<mcola058@uottawa.ca>; <president.ssa@gmail.com>; <rdien093@uottawa.ca>;
<sstoj080@uottawa.ca>; <sduff088@uottawa.ca>; <sfperry@uottawa.ca>;
<giordano@uottawa.ca>; <vdeansci@uottawa.ca>; <tdurst@science.uottawa.ca>;
<vsant019@uottawa.ca>; <matchair@uottawa.ca>; <warren.meyers@gmail.com>;
<Christine.Lefebvre@uottawa.ca>; <president@ssa-aes.com>
Subject: Re: December 6, 2007, GNN 080, 1:00PM, Faculty Council meeting
Date: Saturday, December 01, 2007 2:02 PM

Professeur Rancourt,

I am responding to your most recent unsolicited bulk-email that was addressed to Dean Lalonde, and copied to numerous other persons.

In your email (included below), you have made an accusation of censorship. I presume you are making an accusation that could also be termed "censorship of free speech".

Your accusation is contained in the following passage:

"When SCI 2101 was discussed at the Faculty Curriculum Committee in 2006 some of the latter material ("SOME GROUND RULES" section) was censored, so I was pleased to see that you have not practiced such censorship in forwarding Mr. Stojanovic's documents as-received."

Your accusation was made in such a way that it is not clearly addressed to any individual or identifiable group. Therefore, I must interpret that you are accusing the Faculty Curriculum Committee as a whole of practising censorship.

Such an accusation must be taken seriously by the university community. I presume that you would agree, because you made that accusation in a bulk emailing.

You must be aware that censorship of free speech runs counter to the fundamental ideals of freedom that underpin our modern societies, of which our universities are important components.

I am sure you are also aware that censorship was, and continues to be, the common practice of totalitarian thugs who, over the past century or so, have been responsible for the mass murder of tens of millions of human beings in the name of political ideologies, and worse. Attempts to censor free speech, and attempts to imply that others have censored of free speech, are also a common practise of radical activists who cannot abide that opinions contrary to their own are expressed in public, and can much less abide that their own arguments not always carry the day.

Given that an accusation of censorship, especially when made in a public forum, carries such heavy implications and unpleasant associations with such less-than-reputable groups and political movements, I am sure you will understand my disappointment at reading that, according to your accusation, censorship has recently be practised in the Faculty of Science.

I request that you make clear the target of your accusation of censorship, and, importantly that you share the evidence supporting your accusation, with the Faculty of Science, at the next Faculty Council meeting.

Perhaps censorship was not practised by the Curriculum Committee (or the person or persons whom you have accused). Perhaps the incident concerning the documents that you mention in your email involved justifiable and honest decisions made by a person or persons in fulfillment of their administrative duties.

If your accusation of censorship were found to be without merit, then I would request that you offer an apology to the person or persons who are the targets of your accusation of censorship, at the next Faculty Council meeting, so that such apology would be recorded in the minutes of the meeting, thus correcting the public record.

I have composed this email soley in response to the accusation of censorship that you made in your email, and that appears to target the Faculty Curriculum Committee. This email is a personal initiative; it was composed by myself, and I take sole responsibility for it. I am sending it to the same list of recipients that received your own email, as I think it is necessary that this issue be considered by them.

Please be advised that I will not respond to you or to your collaborators via email.

Sincerely,

Keith Benn, P. Geo.
Associate professor
Department of Earth Sciences
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, ON K1N6N5, Canada
email: kbenn@uottawa.ca
tel: +1-613-562-5800 x6858
fax: +1-613-562-5192

From: <dgr@uottawa.ca>
Sent: Friday, November 30, 2007 4:18 PM
To: <deansci@uottawa.ca>
Cc: <aray013@uottawa.ca>; <chmchair@science.uottawa.ca>;
<alex.lavigne@hotmail.com>; <allison_enright@hotmail.com>;
<deansci@uottawa.ca>; <alongtin@uottawa.ca>;
<arian.novruzi@mathstat.uottawa.ca>; <phychair@science.uottawa.ca>;
<daniel.cayleydaoust@gmail.com>; <carrier@uottawa.ca>; <dfortin@uottawa.ca>;
<David.Bryce@uottawa.ca>; <dehsg@uottawa.ca>; <David.Schneider@uottawa.ca>;
<gblou656@science.uottawa.ca>; <ssa_pres@science.uottawa.ca>;
<gdrouin@science.uottawa.ca>; <heshel@science.uottawa.ca>;
<idclark@uottawa.ca>; <jharden@uottawa.ca>; <jerbrammer@hotmail.com>;
<jarnason@science.uottawa.ca>; <John.Baenziger@uottawa.ca>;
<jblais@science.uottawa.ca>; <khattori@uottawa.ca>;

<kbenn@science.uottawa.ca>; <doyenadj@science.uottawa.ca>;
<louiseh@uottawa.ca>; <llabelle@science.uottawa.ca>; <mtarc100@uottawa.ca>;
<martbert@gmail.com>; <matthew.alteen@gmail.com>; <mcola058@uottawa.ca>;
<president.ssa@gmail.com>; <rdien093@uottawa.ca>; <sstoj080@uottawa.ca>;
<sduff088@uottawa.ca>; <sfperry@uottawa.ca>; <giordano@uottawa.ca>;
<vdeansci@uottawa.ca>; <tdurst@science.uottawa.ca>; <vsant019@uottawa.ca>;
<matchair@uottawa.ca>; <warren.meyers@gmail.com>;
<Christine.Lefebvre@uottawa.ca>; <president@ssa-aes.com>
Subject: December 6, 2007, GNN 080, 1:00PM, Faculty Council meeting

> November 29, 2007

> To: dean André Lalonde, Faculty of Science

> cc: members of Faculty Council

> Re: December 6, 2007, GNN 080, 1:00PM, Faculty Council meeting

> Dear dean André Lalonde,

> In your recent announcement of the next Faculty Council meeting, I was
> pleased to see that you have dropped your conditions that Faculty Council
> meetings are open only to Council members or only to Faculty of Science
> members. I am pleased to see that we are coming back to the high
> standards of transparency that had been set by previous dean Christian
> Detellier who stated that Faculty Council meeting have always been as
> public as university Senate meetings.

> Past dean Christian Detellier also admirably encouraged collegial
> participation by interested and concerned observers, such as when the
> creation of SCI 1101 was discussed at Council. Such methods are more
> productive than a more restrictive approach and helped produce the unique
> SCI 1101 course offering in our faculty.

> I am pleased also to find that, after you have cancelled the last three
> scheduled Faculty Council meetings over the question of your alleged veto
> rights regarding agenda items, you have now added Severin Stojanovic's
> agenda items (attached below) to the agenda, after eight months since you
> first vetoed these items.

> Since two of these agenda items involve me as a presenter, I am prepared
> to make the requested presentations. I look forward to presenting the SCI
> 2101 proposal in particular, given the success of SCI 1101 when it was
> offered in 2006, and given the university community's enthusiasm for these
> new types of courses.

> The 300 or so students and community members who signed a petition for the
> creation of SCI 2101 will be pleased to have this item finally be given
> collegial and democratic consideration by Faculty Council.

> I would ask Council members to take note of the attached background
> information (attached below), so as to make my presentation more
> efficient. When SCI 2101 was discussed at the Faculty Curriculum
> Committee in 2006 some of the latter material ("SOME GROUND RULES"
> section) was censored, so I was pleased to see that you have not practiced
> such censorship in forwarding Mr. Stojanovic's documents as-received.

> Finally, I also ask that these agenda items be placed at the start of the
> meeting because I can only stay for the first part of the afternoon, and
> out of the usual respect for the student and community members who are

> expected to attend for these agenda items.
>
> Sincerely,
> Denis Rancourt
> (Professor)
>
> -----
>
> November 21, 2007
>
> Dr. André Lalonde
> Office of the Dean - Faculty of Science
> University of Ottawa
> Marion Hall
> 140 Louis Pasteur
> Ottawa, Ontario
> Canada K1N 6N5
>
>
> Dear Dean Lalonde,
>
> Re: Motions to be Included in Agenda of Science Faculty Council Meeting of
> December 6, 2007
>
> This is notice pursuant to Art. I-4 of the Faculty of Science By-Laws to
> have the following motions included in the Agenda of the Science Faculty
> Council meeting scheduled for Thursday, December 6, 2007:
>
> Changing the official course title of SCI 1101 to "Science, Activism, and
> Society" ("Science, militantisme, et société" in the French version)", the
> restriction "This course does not count as a science course" be removed
> from the official course description of SCI 1101, and a new bilingual
> version of the course SCI 1101 be approved, as SCI 1901. Professor Denis
> Rancourt will be given the opportunity to present these proposed
> amendments and answer questions. This motion has a supporting document
> (attached).
>
> Creating a second-year "Science, Activism, and Society" course, SCI 2101,
> to be approved in time for the Winter-2008 term. Given the success of SCI
> 1101, Fall 2006, we would discuss the possibility of offering a
> second-year course that students and members of the community have
> requested. Professor Denis Rancourt will be given the opportunity to
> present this proposal and answer questions. This motion has a supporting
> document (attached).
>
> Discussion of how Faculty of Science By-Laws can be enforced. It is not
> within the mandates of the Board of Governors, the Senate, the Office of
> the President, and the Office of the Vice-President Academic and Provost
> to interfere with the application of Faculty of Science By-Laws and the
> internal operation of a faculty.
>
> I postpone the following Agenda items until the next Science Faculty
> Council meeting:
>
> Discussion on the possible improvements to the pedagogical training
> graduate students receives. Many graduate students have been placed in
> teaching posts (directed towards undergraduate students) within the
> Faculty of Science with little to no pedagogical training, and have been
> left on their own to learn how to teach, with minimal guidance.
>

> Discussion on the mandate and procedures of operation of the Undergraduate
> Programs Committee.

>
>
> Sincerely,

>
>
> Severin Stojanovic
> Graduate Student Representative to Science Faculty Council
> Department of Physics
> University of Ottawa
> 150 Louis Pasteur Street
> Ottawa, Ontario
> Canada K1N 6N5

> Encl.

>
>
> -----

> Changes to SCI 1101 and Creation of SCI 2101

>
> Proposal prepared by Professor Denis Rancourt in consultation with
> students and community members.

>
>
> SOME GROUND RULES

>
> In considering courses requested by students in particular, the various
> committees should have the burden of proof in making changes or in
> rejecting a proposal. Committee members should not arbitrarily apply
> their biases or subjective judgements of the value of the project. If
> reasonable arguments can be made for the usefulness and interest in the
> course as it is proposed and for its place in the Faculty then these
> arguments should be accepted rather than brushed aside using a
> paternalistic or authoritarian stance.

>
> During the process, members must abide by the rule that "a course does not
> belong to a professor" and therefore that the course must not be judged by
> judging an imaginary projection of how a particular professor will teach
> the course. There are separate procedures for evaluating the teaching and
> professional conduct of a professor. These questions must not intervene
> in the discussions about new course approvals.

>
> The committees should make every attempt to allow those proposing the
> changes or the new course to present their project, including allowing
> their proposal documents to be forwarded and allowing them to present the
> project at committee meetings. This is a question of simple respect
> towards those who are presenting a concrete plan that they believe will
> benefit many members of the university and broader communities.

>
> It is a matter of respect and transparency for the various committees and
> councils to promptly inform those proposing the new course of meeting
> schedules and outcomes and to invite them to these meetings, at least as
> observers when not presenting. We found this to be less than a reflex in
> the case of SCI 1101 and we ask that more effort be made in this
> direction.

>
> We ask that the present document be forwarded along to each committee and
> council involved in the course approval process, so that each body can

> have the full information of the proposal, without dilution or
> misinterpretation.

>

>

> BACKGROUND

>

> This two-part proposal relates to the recent course, SCI 1101 Science in
> Society, that was first approved for the Fall-2006 term. The course is
> unofficially referred to as "Activism Course". The Senate-approved course
> description for SCI 1101 is:

>

> "SCI 1101: Science in Society (3 cr.)
> This course critically examines the role of science and scientists in
> society and the responsibility of citizens having to deal with the complex
> socio-economic, environmental, political, and ethical issues raised by
> advances in science and technology. The grading system is S/NS.
> This course does not count as a science course."

>

> The course (SCI 1101, Fall 2006) had approximately 130 registered
> students, has no prerequisites, is not presently required in any program,
> and is not presently a prerequisite for any other course.

>

> Judging from student and community member response, the course in its
> present incarnation is a great success.

>

> Initially, there were some objections that such a course that primarily
> discusses the place of science in society and general societal aspects
> that are all impacted by science and technology, rather than delivering
> traditional science content, did not have its place in the Faculty of
> Science. The latter view is not tenable in our modern interdisciplinary
> approach to knowledge and to social responsibility. The latter view did
> not prevail and this course exists in the Faculty of Science.

>

> Initially, there were some objections that the S/NS
> (satisfactory/non-satisfactory) grading system could not be applied in a
> Faculty of Science course. The latter position flies in the face of much
> pedagogical research (including several comparative studies in math and
> science) that has demonstrated the relative advantages of the S/NS system
> when applied in the context of a coherent pedagogical method. The latter
> objection did not prevail and SCI 1101 uses the S/NS grading system.

>

>

> FIRST PROPOSAL: CHANGES TO SCI 1101

>

> We ask that the following changes be made to SCI 1101.

>

> (1) We ask that the title be changed to "Science, Activism, and Society"
> ("Science, militantisme, et société" in the French version). This adds
> the component of action that is central in any analysis of societal
> movements and progress. We cannot study science-society interactions
> without studying the activist actions of both scientists and others, such
> as the anti-war/social-justice activism of Einstein for example.

>

> (2) We ask that the restrictive condition "This course does not count as a
> science course" be removed. It is legitimate for scientists to study
> science-society interactions and they do it from a science perspective.
> This restriction was dropped by the Executive of the Senate but then
> insisted upon by the Faculty of Science Executive. This restriction is
> retrograde and unnecessary. Any program can impose its conditions on
> course selections but it is contrary to the spirit of intellectual

> exploration for the Faculty of Science to judge one of its courses to be
> not worthy of a science elective. This arbitrary restriction has also
> caused much unneeded administrative confusion and errors.

>
> (3) We ask that a new bilingual version of the course be approved, as SCI
> 1901. Truly bilingual and inclusive courses can work and should be
> allowed at the University of Ottawa. In such a course, an effort is made
> to have as many speakers in both official languages and the professor
> privileges her use of French in order to balance the greater presence of
> English in our environment. Each student is encouraged to use the
> language of her choice and many students volunteer for spontaneous and
> continuous translations that add to group work and cohesion. A spirit of
> collaboration is encouraged rather than division of the language groups.

>
> SECOND PROPOSAL: NEW COURSE SCI 2101

>
> We ask that a new course SCI 2101, Science, Activism, and Society II, be
> approved in time for the Winter-2008 term.

>
> This course would have SCI 1101 (or equivalent) as its only prerequisite
> and would allow students to continue their study of science-society
> interactions beyond the introductory exposure they derived from SCI 1101.
> Students would thus have the option to use another elective to continue
> exploring this vast area of study.

>
> The proposed course description is:

>
> "SCI 2101: Science, Activism, and Society II (3 cr.)
> This course critically examines science-society interactions and the
> responsibilities (including action) of citizens having to deal with the
> relevant socio-economic, environmental, political, and ethical issues.
> The grading system is S/NS. Prerequisite: SCI 1101 or 1501 or 1901."

>
> Note on resources: Although not necessary, it would be possible,
> depending on the pedagogical method employed, to give this course
> simultaneously (in the same classroom) as SCI 1101 without requiring a
> separate room or a second professor. For example, in the model used for
> SCI 1101 Fall-2006, concept and content-rich material is presented by
> expert speakers every class such that virtually no student grasps
> everything for most themes. The (pedagogically well established) idea is
> that each student works at her level and extracts and integrates as much
> as she can, as much as she is motivated to. It is therefore to be
> expected that a year or more later the same student would get much more
> from the same presentations. Of course the presentations change because
> the speakers themselves progress and there are different speakers each
> year. This method of mixing students from successive years of the "same"
> course also has several pedagogical advantages in its own right, as is
> well documented in the "peer instruction" pedagogical literature. It
> actually enriches both the new and the "old" students more than if they
> were not exposed to each other in this way.

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> □